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SUBJECT: GHANAIAN MEDIA SHAPE PEACEFUL ELECTION

SUMMARY: Contrary to general concern that some news outlets, especially radio, might stir violent reactions before, during and after Ghana's presidential elections, the local media covered Election Day and immediate results with professionalism and even-handedness, encouraging a peaceful public response. Embassy Accra played a role. END SUMMARY.

11. Radio a Cause for Joy: During the months leading up to Ghana's presidential elections many elements of Ghanaian society, not least of all the media itself, were critical of the inflammatory tone of political news coverage. The largest complaint was reserved for radio station call-in programs, which allowed random and "serial" callers to make inappropriate statements and incited angry responses. (Reftel Accra 1510). Throughout Election Day, however, media sources carried out their role professionally.

12. Most notably, Accra station Joy FM (full national coverage) took the lead for all media in presenting balanced, factual, and appropriate news. Embassy Accra found Joy's online tabulation of results to be reliable, and posted more swiftly than results from the Electoral Commission (EC). On air, Joy and other media adamantly clarified, at every turn, the fact that any results being announced were "provisional" or "projected", and reminded callers, including party officials, to attach these words to their statements.

13. GJA Takes a Stand: Following Election Day the two major parties called press conference after press conference, bandying about their own numbers and assertions of victory. The Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) put a stop to this by announcing a ban on further press conferences, insisting that their elections headquarters would no longer be available for news conferences by any political party, thus quelling public accusations.

14. The National Media Commission (NMC) was given prominent placement in print and on radio for their call to the media against speculating about the results. The NMC took pains to remind the public, especially journalists, that the EC was the only credible source from which results should be taken.

15. State-owned media, represented in print by the Daily Graphic and the Ghanaian Times, and on-air by the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, did an outstanding job of ensuring that each party received equal daily coverage. When measured against the number of votes received by the smaller parties (between 1.4% and .08% for six of the eight parties) this self-discipline in providing coverage to the smaller parties is remarkable. Some concern exists about the number

of paid advertisements and program-length infomercials the ruling party was able to air on state television prior to the elections; however, the news coverage was equitable.

¶6. Embassy role: Embassy outreach provided some assistance to the media for fulfilling their mandate of responsible journalism. These include the five workshops by U.S. freelance journalist Herb Frazier, whose August visit trained journalists in elections reporting in four regions of Ghana; the October visit by U.S. political system speakers Roslyn O'Connell and David Lublin, whose lectures tied the U.S. Elections process with the Ghanaian Elections process; several Ghanaian media participants in the Foreign Press Center elections tours to study coverage of the U.S. elections; and a grant to the NMC to produce Guidelines for Fair and Equitable Coverage of Political Parties by the State-Owned Media.

¶8. Two weeks before the elections, AMB convened eight senior news editors from print, radio, television and electronic media for a lunch and general conversation. The most significant discussion to arise involved the media's plans for announcing election results. The participants came at the discussion from divergent views and, after much friendly disagreement, arrived at the consensus that regardless of how each news outlet chose to announce results, the words "provisional" or "projected" needed to be attached, and that the EC was the sole authority to provide certified results. It seemed at the time that the media heavies had not previously discussed or openly considered this facet of elections journalism; by the time E-Day came around, however, it was clear that Ghana's media had considered every aspect of promoting a peaceful election.

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